

Historical Note on the Origin of Gakkhars

The origin of Gakkhars is an enduring mystery. The historical and cultural record put forward by the Gakkhars claims that they have been settled in the upper part of the Sindh Sagar doab or more precisely the Pothohar region since the advent of the second millennium of the Common Era [1, 2]. This long association not only enabled them to claim the ownership of the territory under their control as patrimony during the early modern period of the Indian history but it also equipped them with a unique insight into the state of affairs of their region, which has remained at the mercy of a multitude of powerful invaders descending on the Indian subcontinent from the north-west. Over the course of centuries, this insight helped them to discern imminent geo-political upheavals at the boundaries of Pothohar with remarkable sagacity, and to align with those who they thought would have an upper hand in the ensuing power struggle [3].

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The history of the Gakkhars during the early modern India (1526-1858) and the last phase of the Delhi sultanate (1206-1526) is fairly well recorded, but prior to that no reliable information is available. The only source of information about the history of Gakkhars during the earlier parts of the Delhi sultanate or even before that is the official Gakkhar chronicle Kaigoharnama [1, 2]. Throughout history, Gakkhars have claimed a Persian origin.

The author of the Kaigoharnama Raizada Diwan Dunichand (d. 1743) did not make a single reference to any well known cotemporary or previous historical work while recording the events associated with the Gakkhars in his book. This was not uncommon for the books written on history in that era. In certain manuscripts of the Kaigoharnama transcribed during the early years of the 20th century, a reference to the well known historian Muhammad Qasim Ferishta (d. 1620) has been inserted, which acknowledges the existence of an alternative version of the origin of Gakkhars [4]. This version asserts an Indian origin of Gakkhars but the validity of Ferishta's assertion remains open to question as he might have confused Khokhars with Gakkhars. The author Raja Muhammad Aslam Khan has erroneously pointed out that this reference was included by Raizada Ratanchand, a descendant of Raizada Dunichand, who was a historian himself and undoubtedly the most prodigious scribe as far as Kaigoharnama is concerned [5]. Multiple copies of the Kaigoharnama transcribed by Raizada Ratanchand are extant but all are devoid of the reference in question. Scribes as a rule refrain from adding or removing anything from the text they are copying. It remains unclear how and when this particular reference was incorporated in the text of the manuscript that was used as a source for all those later copies of the Kaigoharnama that carry this peculiarity. Two of these manuscripts were used for preparing the draft of the Kaigoharnama that was published by The

Panjabi Adabi Academy, Lahore in 1965 [1]. One of these manuscripts had been used almost a decade earlier by Raja Muhammad Yaqub Tariq for translating the Kaigoharnama from Farsi to Urdu [2]. For a detailed description of all known manuscripts of Kaigoharnama and its various translations, the reader is referred to 'Historical Note on Extant Manuscripts of Kaigoharnama', ver. 1.2, dated 7th May, 2024 and 'Historical Note on the Translations of Kaigoharnama', ver. 1.1, dated 3rd June, 2024, respectively. Page | 2

It is pertinent to note that Kaigoharnama is by no means the first historical work to report the supposed Persian origin of the Gakkhars. The traditional history of Gakkhars was well known to earlier chroniclers and reproduced in varying detail and accuracy in multiple books on the history of the Indian subcontinent in general and the Mughal empire in particular [6, 7].

All books on history suffer from anomalies and shortcomings and Kaigoharnama is no exception. Any part of the Kaigoharnama that is not supported by independent historical sources can only be treated as legend or folklore. The origin of Gakkhars as presented in the Kaigoharnama is not corroborated by historical evidence. What Raizada Dunichand included in the book was a mere folk tradition that was prevalent among the Gakkhars regarding their roots and forefathers. There might be some history associated with this folk tradition but it would be very difficult to separate the two. On the contrary, the later part of the history of Gakkhars presented in the Kaigoharnama, specifically those parts that coincide with the rise of the Mughal dynasty in the Indian subcontinent and its later history, are more or less accurate and supported by contemporary historical sources [1, 2].

The names and persons of the progenitors of Gakkhars i.e. Sultan Kaigohar and Gakkhar Shah, their historical eras i.e. being a kin or contemporary of the Persian kings of the mythological Kiani dynasty or the Turkic-Mamluk sovereigns of the empire of Ghazni, and their geographical locations i.e. Isfahan, Tibet, Kashmir, and Kabul, as described in the Kaigoharnama should not be accepted as established historical facts [1, 2]. They are only a part of the Gakkhar folklore and repeated attempts to reconcile historical record with these oral traditions have been ineffectual [2, 5, 8-12]. The modern historians are compelled to look elsewhere in order to develop a hypothesis about the origin of Gakkhars.

The famous British archeologist and historian Alexander Cunningham (1814-1893) attempted to figure out the origin of Gakkhars based on his knowledge and understanding of the ancient history and geography of the Indian subcontinent. He has identified Gakkhars as the descendants of the people who were subjects of Abisares (d. 325 BC), a ruler of the ancient Indian Kasmira kingdom. Abisares allied himself with Alexander the Great (356-323 BC) when the Macedonian king attacked India in 327 BC. The territory ruled by Abisares extended from

the neighborhood of the river Indus in the Hazara region to the river Poonch in the vicinity of the modern day town of Dadyal, and from the present-day area of Rohtas situated on the nullah Kahan in the south to the source of the river Soan located in the mountains north of the district of Rawalpindi [13]. Incidentally, this territory has been considered the traditional stronghold of the Gakkhars throughout history.

Alexander Cunningham has attributed a Scythian origin to Gakkhars, who were settled in the Pothohar region either on the orders of the Persian emperor Darius the Great (d. 486 BC) or by a Scytho-Parthian king during an earlier period whose whole dynasty is represented by the mythical ruler Afrasiab of Turan, the principal antagonist of the Persian epic *Shahnameh* composed by the poet Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi (d. 1020). He has further identified the capital of the first settlement of the Gakkhars in the Pothohar as Abriam (or Waryam), situated on the right bank of the river Jhelum in the vicinity of the village Sultanpur (Dina) [13, 14]. Sultanpur was strategically located, naturally protected on three sides by the river Jhelum. The whole site along with the locality of Waryam was inundated due to construction of the Mangla dam.

Alexander Cunningham's inquiry into the history of the origin of Gakkhars despite its shortcomings is a scholarly treatment of a difficult topic. Many contemporary civil administrators and orientalist ethnographers of Cunningham noted the limitations of his analysis but they acquiesced to his assigning a Turanian origin to the Gakkhars [15, 16]. Interestingly, attributing a Turanian origin to the Gakkhars in a manner endorses their traditional claim of having ancient Iranian roots. Since the publication of Cunningham's analysis in 1871, when addressing the issue of the origin of Gakkhars, almost all chroniclers have either repeated the traditional claim of Gakkhars regarding their origin or cited Cunningham's hypothesis.

In the *Kaigoharnama*, the name of the eponymous progenitor of Gakkhars has been recorded as 'Gakkhar' combined with the patronymic or title of 'Shah'. In fact, the names of the trio of the grandfather, son, and grandson i.e. Kabul, Gakkhar, and Bajli, the presumed early ancestors of the Gakkhars carry this peculiar title [1, 2]. The supposed connection of the progenitors of Gakkhars with Kashmir, Pothohar that may have been considered a part of Kashmir at that time, and Kabul raises the question whether Gakkhars have a hitherto unexplored 'Shahi' or more specifically a Turk Shahi or Hindu Shahi origin.

A geographical anomaly in the *Kaigoharnama* is the location of the first settlement of the Gakkhars following the presumed grant of the whole tract of Pothohar to Gakkhar Shah by the king Mahmud Ghaznavi (971-1030). This first settlement has been identified as the twin localities of Channa and Bhunir, situated in the vicinity of the district of Mirpur [1, 2]. The area

in question is not located in the Pothohar region; rather it falls in the territory of the Jech (Chenhat) doab, situated on the left bank of the river Jhelum. If the description of the Kaigoharnama is to be believed, Gakkhars initially did not settle in the Pothohar. In fact, they settled in the Jech (Chenhat) doab and gradually spread towards Pothohar across the river Jhelum in the following centuries. During this process, the old inhabitants of Pothohar, likely remnants or former allies of the erstwhile Hindu Shahi dynasty, would have been displaced. This relocation and annexation of territory to the west of the river Jhelum starting with the successful occupation of Dangali (Kallar Syedan) as reported in the Kaigoharnama would have involved armed tribal conflict and helped to establish Gakkhars as the new feudal class of Pothohar [1, 2].

The history and influence of both the Turk Shahi and the Hindu Shahi dynasties in those areas of Pothohar that have been traditionally occupied by the Gakkhars has not been explored in any detail [17, 18]. Archeological excavations at the Gakkhar strongholds of Dangali and Pharwala (Kahuta) might help to shed some light on this aspect of the history of the origin of Gakkhars specifically and the antiquity of the Pothohar in general.

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